

The Day that Hurt America

It is September 11, 2001, at 4:50 AM, as I wake up I take a quick shower and get dressed. Today is a big day because I am getting promoted to Lieutenant General of the Air Force, and I have to be at the Pentagon to receive my promotion. As I pull up to the gate to get clearance I talk to my buddy at the gate about how I “may” be getting this promotion and how big of an opportunity this would be for me. I park near the South side of the building as I always do when I come here. When I tell you I don't like coming here I mean it because all branches of the military are here and we want to give each other hell. As I walk through the doors I am greeted by the General and the General of the Air Force. We shake hands and talk about family and other nonsense, then go to the donut and coffee station and grab something. After that, we finally reached a conference room at about 6:00 AM. They talked to me about how I got promoted and where my office would be.

After settling into my office I decided to grab some paperwork from my car that I forgot. All of a sudden I look up and see this big plane coming down towards the Pentagon. I thought, "Is this plane going to hit the building?" I felt worried about what was going to happen next. Then the plane spiraled down towards the building and crashed into the north side of the building. There was a loud boom and a big fireball and a puff of smoke went up. The fire took over the whole building, and the people around me looked shocked.

I grabbed my phone and dialed 911 and told them what happened. It sounded like sirens were going off all around the city including sirens from inside the building. In the distance, I could see ambulances, fire trucks, and police cars starting to roll in. I decided I needed to do something. I ran from my car to the

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closest fireman and said, "I was trained in emergency response, how can I help?" He told me, "Put on that gear and go meet up with Lt. Smith by that ladder truck over there." I quickly and frantically put the gear on. When I was done I met up with Lt. Smith and told him I was there to help. He instructed me to go inside and help anybody I could and support the other firefighters.

I fought through the flames and smoke. I can't see much because of all the smoke in the air and I hear the crackling of the fire. Things are falling all around me and I hear people screaming for help. I pulled someone from the wreckage. They looked burnt beyond recognition. I tried to see if they were still alive but they were not. I leave them to see if there are any survivors. I run down the hall to see if there is anybody left in any of the rooms. I hear people yelling for help a couple of rooms down so I fight through the fire to get to them. When I break into the room there are a handful of people there. They were huddled in a corner trying to escape the smoke. I noticed there was a sink in the room so I began to tell people, "Take off your shirts and wet them with water and put it over your mouth." They did what I said, got their shirts wet, and started covering their mouths.

I lead this small group of people around obstacles, falling ceilings, and the walls of fire. It was dangerous. I almost lost some of them to the fire. Thankfully we made it out of the fire in one piece. As I brought the people out I thought to myself that there were probably more people inside. So I went back inside looking for any screams or help. First, I checked the south side of the building and saw nothing. Then I went to the north side and a section of the ceiling gave way, crashing down with a deafening roar. I was pinned to the ground and blacked out. When I woke up the whole area was filled with smoke and I could hear people in the distance. I tried to move and scream for help but I wasn't able to, at that moment I felt hopeless and defeated but then I thought to myself that more people needed my help so I got the strength to move some wood off my back and my legs. I carried on walking over burnt wood smoke in my eyes. I

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saw people down the hallway and yelled “Hey you guys need some help?” they screamed back” Yes!” I tried my best to get over there, but there was so much debris in my way, making it hard. I finally found another way around as I was getting closer. I heard a loud crack and then a BIG BOOM, then a scream.

I rushed over to see what happened and I saw a wooden plank on top of a body. I tried to lift it but it was too heavy for me to pick up. I checked to see if he had a pulse but sadly he did not have one. I told the people in the room “There was nothing we can do here but find a way out”. As I led them to find a way out we saw more people on the way and they joined us. Finally, after a long search, we found our exit and I helped them get to Lt. Smith. He told me to take a breather and get some water, as I sat there I was thinking about how I could have saved that man who died from the fallen plank. I pull out my phone which is still in good condition. Funny enough, I check to see what time it is as I am doing that an officer comes up to me and asks “ Are you alright sir?” I say, “Yes.” He tells me, “We have everything under control now sir you can go home.” I nod at him.

Once I get home I take a shower and make some food, but things still really don't feel the same after what happened. It feels weird because it was so chaotic and dramatic. I feel grief and sickness because of the dead bodies I saw and the smell of them. I also kept thinking about the man under the plank of wood and if I got there sooner I could have maybe saved him. The next day I woke up sick to my stomach, went straight to the bathroom, threw up and got some water. I didn't feel hungry so I just went right back to my bed and lay down. I thought to myself how hard America was hit just in one day and how we never saw this coming.